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Unequal access to Out of School Activities

Jenny Chanfreau, Emily Tanner, Meg Callanan, Karen Laing, Jonathan Paylor, Amy Skipp and Liz Todd

This project investigates if and how out of school activities affect primary school children's attainment. Educational inequalities between children from different backgrounds at the end of primary school are pronounced. We want to investigate how out of school activities change as children grow, and how this change may vary for children with different characteristics and circumstances, including ethnicity, social class and family income. We will then look at how these different patterns are linked with end of primary school results. Do they help narrow the attainment gap or simply reinforce existing socio-economic differences? In this briefing paper we present our initial descriptive analysis exploring what children do outside lesson time in their primary school years.



- Taking part in organised physical activities, such as swimming lessons or football training, or a school sports club, is strongly linked to the level of education of the child's mother. Four in ten children whose mother had a postgraduate degree or equivalent qualification took part in sports activities at least weekly, compared with less than one in ten children whose mother had no formal qualifications.
- There was a substantial rise in the proportion of children receiving extra tuition between the ages of 7 (5%) and 11 (22%). Children of Indian, Black, Chinese and other ethnic minority origin were most likely to receive extra tuition. Children whose parents were self-employed were also slightly more likely than the average child their age to have extra tuition.
- Attendance at both breakfast club and after-school clubs increased with age. This increase did not seem to be driven by a need for childcare. Instead, it might be that children want to do more hobbies before and after school as they grow older. Or possibly these clubs have just become more readily available and accessible in recent years.
- While time spent watching TV remained relatively stable over the primary school years, computer and video gaming time increased substantially between the age of 5 and 11.
- Most 11 year olds spent 1 to 2 hours per week doing homework. Just over half of 11 year olds also helped out around the house, doing household chores every day.

Introduction to the study

This 15 month project is funded by the Nuffield Foundation and carried out in collaboration by NatCen Social Research, Newcastle University and ASK Research. The study will provide insights into the best use of funds for out of school activities by investigating how primary school children spend their time outside of school and the implications for their academic attainment.

One of the first stages of the project has been to map out how primary school children spend their time outside school. To do this, we have analysed data from the Millennium Cohort Study (MCS). This survey follows the lives of 19,000 children born in 2000/01, collecting information at key points in their childhood. Five sweeps of data are available so far, including three times during the primary school years: at the ages of 5, 7 and 11 years. We have looked cross-sectionally at engagement in different activities at these three time points, which correspond to the beginning of primary school, the end of the Key Stage 1 and the end of Key Stage 2 (the final year of primary school). We have also looked at how engagement in different activities differ at each time point by child and family characteristics.

What are out of school activities?

The Department for Education defines out of school activities as “learning activity outside normal school hours that children take part in voluntarily. It encompasses a wide range of learning activities, and also helps meet the needs of parents.”¹ In this study we have also taken a broad definition of out of school activities, capturing different ways that children spend their time outside of compulsory schooling lesson time. Our main focus is formal activities that are supervised and organised by adults. Examples of formal activities include after-school clubs, music lessons, sports training but also childcare, whether provided by a childminder or a grand-parent. While these formal activities are our main focus, we will also look at what else children do with their time outside class time, including leisure time activities (such as playing with friends and family, watching TV and reading for pleasure) but also other activities that may be required of them such as homework and household chores.

Findings

Music lessons

At age 11, 21% of children were receiving music lessons that the parents paid for. Receiving music tuition was more common among girls (24%) than boys (19%). Music tuition was also particularly common among children of Chinese and other ethnic minority origin (31%, compared with 22%

among White children and 19% among Indian children). However, marked differences became apparent when comparing take-up of music lessons by parental characteristics:

- 43% of children whose mother had a postgraduate degree had music lessons, compared with 6% of children whose mother had no formal qualifications;
- 26% of children in households with an income above the poverty line had music lessons, compared with 4% of poor children, and linked to this,
- 36% of children with a parent in a managerial or professional occupation had music lessons, compared with 7% of children whose parents were not in work.

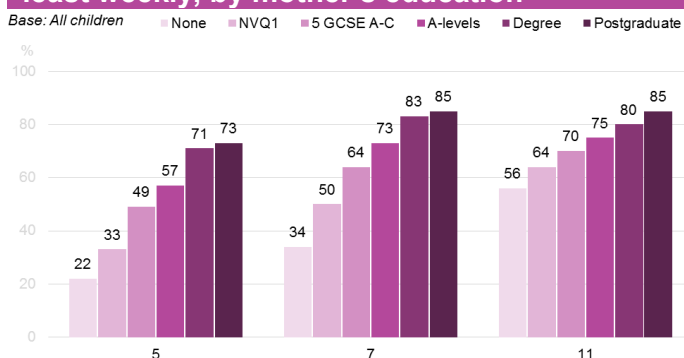
Music lessons were not asked about at ages 5 and 7.

Sport and physical activities

Take up of regular organised physical activities increased with age: 53% of 5 year olds; 67% of 7 year olds and 73% of 11 year olds did sports training or exercise clubs at least weekly. This includes a wide range of physical activities, from swimming lessons and ballet classes to football training and tennis lessons, but excludes PE lessons at school. At the age of 5, more girls (57%) than boys (50%) took part in physical activities but by the age of 11 the boys (74%) had overtaken the girls (71%). Frequent physical activity was most common among children with a highly educated mother and among children whose parent had a managerial or professional job.

- At age 11, 85% of children whose mother had a postgraduate degree, and 80% of children whose mother had an undergraduate degree, did organised physical activities outside lesson time at least weekly. This compares with 56% of children whose mother had no formal qualifications. The differences were even more pronounced at age 5 and age 7 (see Figure 1).

Figure 1 Taking part in physical activities at least weekly, by mother's education



- Similarly, at all three ages, weekly participation in sport was highest among children with a parent in a managerial or professional job, and lowest among children living in non-working households.

¹ <http://www.education.gov.uk/vocabularies/educationtermsandtags/457>

Extra academic tuition

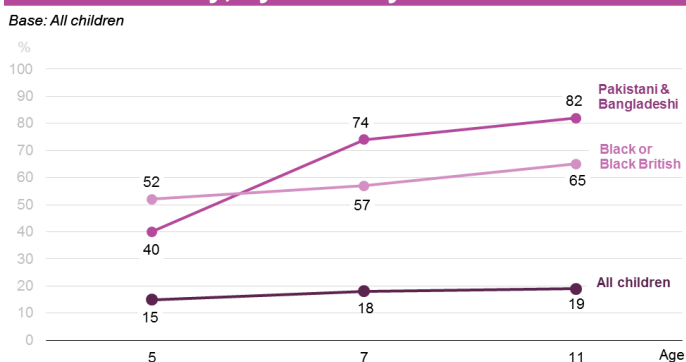
Extra academic tuition also became more common as children grew. At 7, 5% of children received extra tuition, which rose to 22% of 11 year olds. At both ages, girls were slightly more likely to receive tuition in maths and boys were slightly more likely than girls to receive tuition in English (age 11) or writing (age 7).

- At the age of 7, the main differences in receiving extra tuition were by ethnic group: extra tuition being most common among Indian children (20%) and least common among White children (3%) at that age. Children of self-employed parents also stood out at age 7 as being slightly (but significantly) more likely to receive extra tuition, with 7% having tuition in at least one subject.
- Ethnic differences remained at age 11; 48% of children of other (including Chinese) ethnic origin, 47% of Black children and 42% of Indian children received extra tuition, while 20% of White children did so.
- Interestingly, by age 11, social class differences were also more apparent than at age 7, although the differences were smaller than between ethnic groups. Extra tuition was most common among children whose mother had a postgraduate degree (30%) and least common among children whose mother had no qualifications (19%).
- Children of parents with managerial or professional jobs (27%), or self-employed (26%) were also more likely than children of parents in semi-routine or routine occupations (18%) or in non-working households (15%) to have extra tuition.

Religious services and classes

Regular attendance at religious service or class remained relatively stable, increasing only slightly with age, from 15% at age 5 to 18% at age 7 and 19% at age 11. Unsurprisingly, the proportion of pupils who attended a religious service or class at least weekly differed by ethnicity. It was most common among Pakistani and Bangladeshi and Black children and least common among White children at all three time points.

Figure 2 Taking part in religious service or class at least weekly, by ethnicity

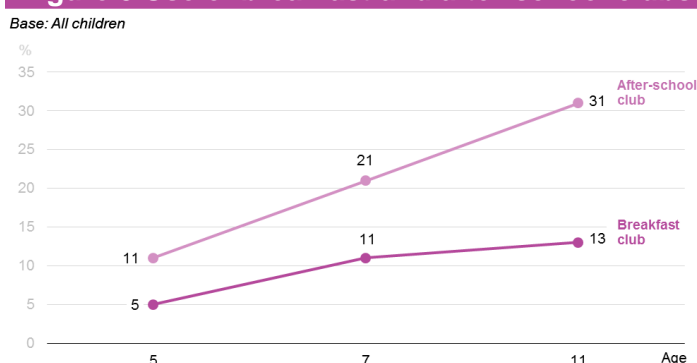


However, regular attendance also increased much more steeply with age among the groups where religious attendance was already quite common at the age of 5 (see Figure 2). Among Pakistani and Bangladeshi children, weekly attendance at religious service or class rose from 40% at age 5 to 82% at age 11; coinciding with the age when Muslim children commonly start to attend Mosque and Islamic classes. Among Black children, regular attendance rose from 52% at age 5 to 65% at age 11.

Breakfast clubs and after-school clubs

Use of both breakfast club and after-school clubs increased with age: from 5% of children going to breakfast club and 11% going to after-school club at the age of 5, to 13% and 31% respectively at age 11 (Figure 3).

Figure 3 Use of breakfast and after-school clubs



Use of both types of club was noticeably higher among children with full-time working parents at ages 5 and 7 but the differences by parental work status reduced with age. By age 11 it was only children of full-time working lone parents who were more likely than others to go to clubs. While clubs were mostly used for childcare purposes at age 5, the proportion using clubs for this reason declined between ages 5 and age 7 (the reason for club use was not asked at age 11). This decline was particularly apparent for after-school clubs, suggesting that the rise in after-school club use between the age of 5 and 7 was for reasons other than a need for childcare. One reason for the increase in take-up of clubs might be increased availability and accessibility of the clubs. At age 5, 69% of after-school club users reported that the club was based on school premises, which increased to 79% at age 7.

Childcare

The proportion of children in formal or informal childcare remained relatively stable over time. About a third of children at each time point (30%-34%) were looked after by a family friend or relative, such as a grandparent. The amount of time spent in informal childcare also remained quite steady, at about 4 hours per week (median) at each age point.

Formal childcare (other than clubs), such as childminder care, was less common. Seven per cent of children at ages 5 and 7 respectively, and 4% of 11 year olds, had some formal childcare on weekdays in term-time. The amount of time spent in formal childcare also declined with age, from a median of 8 hours per week at age 5 to a median of 5 hours per week at age 11.

Unsurprisingly, at all ages, children in families where both parents worked full-time, or in families with a working lone parent, were most likely to use formal and/or informal childcare.

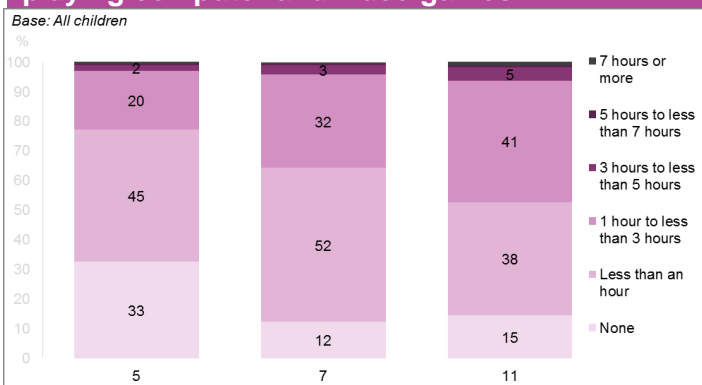
Leisure time, chores and homework

The time spent watching TV remained relatively stable over the primary school years, with 82%-83% of children watching up to three hours of TV per school day. Computer gaming, however, increased with age. At age 5, 22% of children spent an hour or more playing computer games. At age 11, nearly half of children (47%) did so (see Figure 4). At age 11, there is also a clear gender difference: 62% of boys spent more than an hour a day gaming, compared with 33% of girls. Girls were instead more likely to regularly read for enjoyment (as distinct from schoolwork): 53% read for pleasure 'most days', compared with 36% of boys.

Spending time with friends outside school also increased with age. While 28% of 5 year olds spent time with friends at least several times a week, among 11 year olds this figure was 52% as many were able to socialise without parents arranging or supervising visits, as well as at clubs.

Meanwhile other physical activity, including active play with friends and siblings but not including organised clubs or lessons, decreased between ages 7 and 11, on average. Two-thirds (66%) of 7 year olds were physically active in this way at least 5 days a week, compared with about half (48%) of 11 year olds.

Figure 4 Hours per term-time weekday spent playing computer and video games



Of course, not all time outside school and organised clubs is leisure time. Most 11 year olds spent 1 to 2 hours per week doing homework. The time spent on homework varied significantly by ethnicity, with 25% of children of Chinese and other ethnic origin, 24% of Indian and 20% of Black children spending 5 or more hours per week on homework, compared with 7% of White children. At the age of 11, 78% of children also got involved in some household chores at least weekly, with over half (53%) doing chores several times a week or daily. A tenth of 11 year olds (11%) also had some caring commitments, looking after elderly, sick or disabled family members at least weekly.

Next steps for the study

Our analysis of MCS data will now turn to tracking individual children in the data to see how their engagement in organised activities changed as they matured. We also explore whether there are different patterns in activity participation. The final stage of the MCS analysis will then look at whether, and how, different activities are linked with educational attainment at the end of primary school, with a particular focus on children from deprived backgrounds. The MCS analysis will be complemented by qualitative case studies.

More about the study

This study has multiple strands and is conducted in collaboration with co-principal investigator Professor Liz Todd and Karen Laing at **Newcastle University**, and with Amy Skipp at **ASK Research**. We have identified key theories of how out of school activities might be linked with educational attainment and are building logic models to investigate the strength of different academic theories in explaining any such associations found. The findings presented here are based on analysis by **NatCen Social Research** of Millennium Cohort Study (MCS) data from sweeps 3, 4 and 5, downloaded from the UK Data Service.¹ The study will also include qualitative case studies drawing together the views and experiences of parents, children and out of school activity providers. To find out more about the study, including the theories and the qualitative case studies, visit our project webpage <http://www.natcen.ac.uk/our-research/research/out-of-school-activities/>. You can also let us know what you think on our message board <http://www.natcen.ac.uk/blog/from-latch-key-kids-to-pushy-parents-out-of-school-activities-and-the-education-gap>. For more information contact project director Dr Emily Tanner (Emily.Tanner@NatCen.ac.uk).

¹ University of London. Institute of Education. Centre for Longitudinal Studies, *Millennium Cohort Study: Third Survey, 2006* [computer file]. 6th Edition. Colchester, Essex: UK Data Archive [distributor], December 2012. SN: 5795 , <http://dx.doi.org/10.5255/UKDA-SN-5795-3>; *Millennium Cohort Study: Fourth Survey, 2008* [computer file]. 4th Edition. Colchester, Essex: UK Data Archive [distributor], December 2012. SN: 6411 , <http://dx.doi.org/10.5255/UKDA-SN-6411-3>; *Millennium Cohort Study: Fifth Survey, 2012* [computer file]. Colchester, Essex: UK Data Archive [distributor], February 2014. SN: 7464 , <http://dx.doi.org/10.5255/UKDA-SN-7464-1>